

LECTURE IV

COUNT TOLSTOY THE NOVELIST

A TRANSLATOR of Turgenev, writing some thirty-five or forty years ago, mentioned several Russian authors of that day, among them Tolstoy, whom he described as "a writer of military stories." He suggested that perhaps some selections from Tolstoy's works might be translated into English, but that his novels in their entirety would not appeal to the English-speaking world. Yet Tolstoy's works have been translated into English, not once, but several times over, and for the last twenty-five years have made a deeper impression on mankind than the works of any of his contemporaries, Ibsen scarcely excepted. His estate, Yasnaya Polyana, was the Mecca of literary pilgrims. Tolstoy himself, "the grand *mujik*," as he has been called, stood somehow over and above our strenuous civilization—a prophet, a seer, a judge, whom mankind venerated even while criticizing. Dostoyevsky's novels barely kept the wolf from his door; his death did not impress the English-speaking world sufficiently to evoke even a notice in the English press. But the demand for Count Tolstoy's novels led a foreign publisher to offer him one million rubles for his copyrights; and when Tolstoy was dying at Astapovo no item of news was considered more important throughout the world. What can account for such astonishing influence?

Is it, perhaps, because human nature is enamoured of the unusual? The conventional, the mediocre produces little impression on us, nor do we feel drawn toward the perfectly

respectable; but the original personality is always sure to compel our attention, because of our normal demand for abnormal experiences. Mankind has repeatedly lost its heart to those who have defied and denounced it, who have dared boldly to deny its dominant conventions and principles of life. The sophisticated day of Athenian culture and Corinthian luxury, when the beauty-loving Hellenic soul sipped at superfine delights and weighed in delicate balance the slightest shades of bodily and mental pleasure, was just the right day for a Diogenes. The cynic of Sinope came to the Greek children of fashion and convention, and he spat at their artificial life. They vied with each other in gorgeous living and festivity; Diogenes fared on garlic and lived in the proverbial tub. They spent their life in a mad pursuit after social distinction and yielded admiration to success and power; Diogenes scorned all social honor as empty, and found his satisfaction in his own self-complete life. And yet few men in Greece commanded such respect as Diogenes. Even so the rich, sensuous Florentines turned to the scathing sermons of Savonarola. The formal, heartlessly intellectual eighteenth century was similarly shocked and conquered by Jean Jacques Rousseau's sentimental plea for a return to nature; and Rousseau's gospel was the more compelling precisely because it was the absolute negation of all conventional ideals. In all these cases the daring challenge of the prophet of the simple or austere or natural life had resistless power; for the world's ideal of life is like a pendulum and constantly oscillates between extremes.

This reflection may perhaps help us to appreciate the significance of Tolstoy's tremendous success as a writer and his profound influence as a prophet. At first sight the power and influence of this modern Diogenes are hard to understand. How is it possible for a man to command such uni-

versal attention when he negates the basic principles of our modern life? In an age of the most extreme universal struggle for self-advancement and conquest, Tolstoy preaches non-resistance; in an age whose great distinction is that of having worked the greatest wonders in the field of material achievement, he scorns material progress; in an age of the division of labor, he considers no man moral unless he produces for himself the necessities of life. Yet in spite of it all, he draws millions to himself. Not in spite of it all, some may say, but precisely because of it: Tolstoy appeals to us as he does just because he is so—one might almost say—perverse! Or again, perhaps because he is so genuinely in earnest, so human, and therefore such a puzzle.

When we come to examine Tolstoy's art, Tolstoy's gospel, and when we look into his life, we do feel puzzled. It is indeed not easy for us to understand his lifelong struggle with the problem of the meaning and worth of human existence. To us whose souls increase from year to year at so much per centum, and whose troubles and ideals are alike sordid, Tolstoy's spiritual trials and agonies seem abnormal, unreal,—so unreal that many of us even go so far as to doubt the sincerity of this Russian count who put on the peasant's blouse and went to the harvest fields to plow side by side with his one-time serfs. Tolstoy's writings are not the product of complacent leisure. Like Turgenev, like Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy also records in his works his own struggle with the problem of life. If his solution of life's problem strikes us as bold, we shall find the actual decisions he took in his own life much bolder,—and if they puzzle us, who shall say that Tolstoy is to blame? "When a book and a head strike against each other, and a hollow sound ensues, is the trouble always in the book?"

Lyof Nikolayevitch Tolstoy, like Turgenev, came from

the cream of society. Like Turgenev's ancestry, his also went back to the court of Peter the Great. Tolstoy's own father, Nikolai, had been prominent in Russian military history; his mother was born Princess Maria Volkonsky, and there are good reasons for believing that Tolstoy's own parents were in his mind when he told the romance of Nikolai Rostov and the Princess Maria Bolkonsky in "War and Peace." From the very start young Lyof was an uncommon boy. Keen mentally, but not over-diligent; suspicious, yet generous; morbid, with a certain inborn melancholy, and nevertheless a recklessly joyous and even mischievous youth, he must have been a boy of a thousand questions, the despair of nurses and tutors. Certainly he tells us as much in his autobiographic sketches, "Childhood," "Boyhood," and "Youth." Already, at the age of fifteen, he showed skeptical tendencies. The problems of life and death and the meaning of human existence troubled this unquiet spirit. He went to the University of Kazan, and, trying to do something unusual, entered the department of Oriental languages.

He was strong physically. When, in "Anna Karenin," he describes the physique of Konstantin Levin, we can well imagine the prototype. A vigorous body and a restless mind,—that was Tolstoy at the easy-going University of Kazan, the Mecca at that time of the gilded Russian youth with full purses and empty heads. Tolstoy found only tedium in the coarse jollity of his fellows. He did little work, but his soul was devoured with countless longings, taking the shape now of some ideal of perfect womanhood, now of some unrealized Utopia.

From the department of Oriental languages he changed to the department of law, but found it no less futile. He felt a sort of unreality in all academic scholarship. His pro-

fessors were fossils; they did not answer, they were not even interested in the life-and-death problems which engrossed him. They shut their eyes to him and his actual human questions, and they sing-songed their lectures on what happened a thousand years ago. And his fellow-students? What seekers after truth were these rakes who squandered their time and substance in indolence and revel and debauch? What spiritual light could be looked for from these card-fiends and midnight wanderers? The university disgusted Tolstoy, and he left it without bothering about his diploma.

The young count returned to his estate and for a while devoted his time to improving the miserable condition of his serfs. The aspirations of nineteen-year-old Prince Nekhludov, described in "A Russian Proprietor," are doubtless transcriptions from Tolstoy's own life. He had read with the greatest enthusiasm the twenty volumes of Jean Jacques Rousseau, wore a medallion with Rousseau's picture around his neck, and planned to lead a life close to nature. But, like Nekhludov, his altruistic dreams for his estate and serfs were unaccompanied by any knowledge of agricultural matters, and, as his enterprise failed, this sentimental pupil of Rousseau began imitating his master's manner of life instead of his teachings. Gipsy dancers and revelers, gamblers and roisterers became his daily company. He who had longed to become a saint turned a beast. Months passed in this way,—in riotous living which later necessitated the sale of the house in which he had been born to pay his gambling debts. The "Recollections of a Billiard-Marker" is a pithy record of the gambling Tolstoy's psychology: one can readily imagine Tolstoy anticipating for himself precisely such a contemptible end as Prince Nekhludov's in the "Recollections." But with the same objectivity with which Tolstoy paints his moral degradation and ignominy, does he deline-

ate also the deeper yearnings after nobility which stirred in his soul disgust for his riotous living.

Once more disenchanted, now with himself, he entered the army and went to the wild Caucasian country. Here in the untamed, unsophisticated life of nature he sought peace; and his Caucasian life and dreams are well reflected in his story "The Cossacks."

The hero, Dmitri Olyenin, is Tolstoy himself. Olyenin is a Moscow society young man who has squandered half of his patrimony, has never chosen any career or done anything. And yet he is not lacking in virtue so much as he is lacking in spiritual orientation. He feels in himself the fresh spontaneity of youth, and yet does not know in what channel of activity to invest it. His jolly life yields him no happiness; his long nights do not bring him contentment on the morrow. He craves contentment and happiness, but they elude him. "Hitherto the only object of his affection had been himself, and this was inevitable because he expected from himself nothing but what was good, and he had not as yet lost his illusions about himself." The love of others he has compelled, but his own heart is innocent of love's dominion. "Why have I never yet fallen in love?" he asks himself as his sleigh flies southward, away from Moscow's snows and sordid gaiety, flies southward toward the gleaming sun and winding Terek and smoking *auls* and the Cossacks and Tartars of the wild Caucasian mountainland.

And what a rare world is the world of these wild folk! Tolstoy's tale "A Prisoner of the Caucasus" possesses exquisite simplicity and directness, but there is more elemental intensity, more pervading atmosphere in "The Cossacks." Turgenev, in a burst of enthusiasm, called the story of Olyenin Russia's best novel. It reminds one of "Taras Bulba"; there is something of Gogol's savage magnificence

in the picture of old Uncle Yeroshka. This Terek land is a land in which money counts a good deal, but *jigit* bravery a good deal more. The Caucasian Cossack has no mean estimate of his own manner of life; "he regards himself as having attained the highest degree of culture, looks on the Cossack as alone worthy of the name of man, and affects to despise every one else." The former young lion of Moscow drawing-rooms finds himself in a land in which ragged and carelessly dressed, but richly armed bravos treat him, a prince and a wealthy serf-owner, with kind condescension, and where an untutored rustic belle, whose costume consists of precisely one garment, vouchsafes his elegance not one single glance.

"The Cossacks" is a novel with a Rousseauian theme. Tolstoy shows the transformation wrought in Olyenin's soul by the simple, elemental, nobly savage life of the Caucasian folk. Rousseau himself could not have drawn more magnificently the portrait of the man living close to nature: "Olyenin in appearance was an entirely different man. Instead of smoothly shaven cheeks, he wore a young mustache and a beard. Instead of the pale, unhealthy complexion of one whose nights are spent in dissipation, he showed a fresh and ruddy tan over his cheeks, forehead, and ears. Instead of a perfectly new black coat, he wore a dirty white *cherkeska* with wide lapels and carried a rifle. . . . His whole being breathed of health, happiness, and satisfaction."

But it is not enough for the Moscow-bred *junker* to don a Cossack costume in order to find happiness and meaning in life. The inner life of the Cossack is one of animal simplicity. When the intrepid Lukashka kills a Chechenetz, his conscience does not bother him in the slightest: they may kill him, he may kill them—it is part of life. Killing an enemy, stealing a horse, rioting, feasting and drinking, and

having luck, and excelling in all—these comprise Lukashka's life, these make him famous. Maryanna the virgin frankly admires this dissolute galliard. And Uncle Yeroshka's philosophy of life is easily expounded: "Every one has his own customs. But, in my opinion, it's all one. God made everything for man's enjoyment. There is no sin in anything."

The Cossack lives close to nature. Nature rouses in him no spiritual problems, because he has not yet attained the problem level. But to Olyenin life itself is a problem. He has come to the Caucasus to find meaning, genuine happiness in life. If nature is to exalt his life, it must do for him more than make it contentedly animal. Uncle Yeroshka may spend the night perched up on a tree-branch watching for wild boars, and his consciousness is blankly identical with that of the beast he hunts. But when Olyenin, with seven pheasants hanging from his belt, stretches himself on the ground in the damp, dark lair of the stag he is pursuing, he cannot become one with his environment. He cannot help philosophizing: "Here I, Dmitri Olyenin, an entity distinct from all others, am lying all alone, God knows where, in the very place where lives a stag, an old stag, a handsome fellow, and in a place, likewise, where no human being has ever been before, or thought of being. . . . Around me, flying among the leaves which seem to them like vast islands, the gnats are hovering in the air and buzzing; one, two, three, four, a hundred, a thousand, a million gnats, and each one of them is buzzing something for some special reason around me, and each one of them is a Dmitri Olyenin, an entity distinct from all the others as much as I am."

But how is a Dmitri Olyenin to conduct himself in the midst of this world of gnats and stags and Lukashkas and Maryannas in order to find true happiness? "How must I

live so as to be happy? . . . Man is endowed with a craving for happiness: therefore it must be legitimate. . . . Circumstances may make it impossible to satisfy this craving. . . . What cravings can always be satisfied independently of external conditions? Love, self-denial." Rousseau had sent the stags and gnats to raise the problem; Christ and Schopenhauer offered its solution.

Olyenin tries the altruistic path; he would sacrifice himself for others. But those whose contentment he would attain do not understand his motives. When he presents Lukashka with his horse, the Cossack brave suspects that he would bribe him for some purpose of his own. Olyenin, who respects and loves the simple *stannitza* folk, is alien to their affections; but they call the jovial rake Byeletzky "the little grandfather." Olyenin looks wistfully upon Maryanna's virgin simplicity, but Maryanna first becomes aware of his existence when, a bit tipsy at a party, he embraces her.

Olyenin's life is not so easily ordered as the life of a Lukashka. Lukashka's love for Maryanna is described in very simple language; it is a common enough emotion. But Olyenin's passion for the pink-shirt-garbed daughter of the shrewish Dame Ulitka rouses a riot of perplexities. When Lukashka is wounded in a scouting expedition, all the tenderness which Maryanna has ever felt for the child of Moscow vanishes in her wild outburst of passion for her savage gallant. To us Olyenin may be an exalted soul; to her he is contemptible, insignificant alongside of Lukashka. The love-story is ended; and—need we say it?—ended is also un-mixed Rousseauism.

Tolstoy had sought peace in the Caucasus. But wild, unmeaning peace began to tire him. The success of his writings, which in the early fifties began to appear in Nekrasov's *Sovremennik* ("The Contemporary") and caused his name

to be uttered with that of Turgenev, roused in him new ambitions. Elemental nature had not satisfied this spirit; the Crimean War roused his martial instincts, and so we find him fighting the Turks, first in Silistria, Bulgaria, and then at the siege of Sevastopol. His experiences during this terrible ordeal, Tolstoy has recorded in his three sketches, "Sevastopol in December," "in May," "in August."

War has been painted before and since in more majestic and in more terrible colors; the externals of martial life have been more tellingly delineated even by Tolstoy himself in "War and Peace"; but we may doubt if any one has succeeded in conveying the inner human atmosphere of warfare more hauntingly than Tolstoy has conveyed it in these Sevastopol sketches. He shows slight interest in the mechanics of war, it is war's spirit he would portray,—the spirit of war as it manifests itself in the manner and life of captain and sergeant and common soldier. Tolstoy possesses the uncanny power of picturing the psychology of a simple, innocent, lovable young man who comes to Sevastopol to serve his God and Czar, save his country, and win an order of merit, and who finds that to do this he must murder people and risk being murdered himself; the initial physical fear and moral recoil, the intoxication of ever-present danger, the hardening of soul by the intimate visitant Death, and the genuine and assumed stoicism which, in the life of the experienced officer and private, is so frequently accompanied by defiant daredevil gambling and joviality. Striking is the picture of the two Koseltzov brothers. The younger's eyes dim with tears because he imagines his brother is displeased with him, but on the morrow he must kill human beings callously, brutally, and gain the order of Anna or the order of Vladimir for his pains.

And, while we follow the reckless officer, the brutal offi-

cer, and the corrupt officer, and the young idealist who comes to Sevastopol to die for God and the Czar, we see and hear in the background the thousands who count only as so many privates, pawns on the chessboard of war. They live from day to day, they die stolidly without any philosophizing, jesting with death, thinking of a cross for bravery, perhaps, but much more thinking of their discharge. " 'You may say what you think, but when we've peace, we're sure to have an imperial review at Warsaw, and then, if we don't all get our discharge, we shall be put on the permanent reserve.' Just then a shrieking, glancing ball flew over the talkers' heads and struck a stone. 'Mind, or you'll get your discharge in full before to-night,' said one of the soldiers. They all laughed. And not only before night, but before two hours had passed, two of them had got their discharge in full and five more were wounded; but the rest went on joking just the same."

It is not war as glorious combat or noble self-sacrifice that Tolstoy portrays, but war in its terrible intensity, brutalizing, sordid war, war exalted in its inhumanity. He would tell the real inside truth about war: "The hero of my tale, whom I love with all the power of my soul, whom I have tried to portray in all his beauty, who has been, is, and will be beautiful, is—Truth."

Naturally the censor did not like this truth and blue-penciled the manuscript of the Sevastopol sketches in accordance with the demands of imperial Russia. But, even in their mutilated form, the stories, published in Nekrasov's *Sovremennik*, made Tolstoy the literary idol of Russia. Nekrasov wrote him: "Truth—in such a form as you have introduced it into our literature—is something completely new among us." Czar Nikolai even sent an order that special care be taken of the young writer and that he be re-

moved to a safe place, but Tolstoy insisted on sharing the dangers with his soldiers. Finally his commander ordered him to write an official account of the siege, and sent him with it as a messenger to St. Petersburg.

Here Tolstoy was received with ovations. Every favor St. Petersburg had to offer was at his disposal. Dinners, dances, fame, wine, women—all were his. But once more he turned away disenchanted. This effeminate, futile existence began to weary him. What was he supposed to be? A teacher of the people; a spiritual leader? So were all his fellow-writers. But what was he teaching Russia; what did he give in return for all this fame and money? He himself did not know. He turned to his fellow-writers, he tells us in his "Confession": "They disputed, quarreled, abused, deceived, and cheated one another. . . . Almost all of them were immoral men, most of them worthless and insignificant, and beneath the moral level of those with whom I associated during my former dissipated and military career, but conceited as only those can be who are wholly saints, or those who do not know what holiness is."

At that time the Czar Alexander II was already inaugurating the new era of liberalism, of reforms. The emancipation of the serfs was in the air; all Russia talked of the people's rights. But how were the Russian masses to be elevated? Tolstoy took his only trips to Europe—three of them—to study social and agricultural conditions, and in 1861 returned to his estate Yasnaya Polyana, freed his own serfs before the publication of the Emancipation Edict, and devoted his time to the improvement and education of his peasants. He established a school on his estate, teaching the peasant children on the theory that the child should have full freedom in his development; the teacher should not imprint his ideas and habits on the child, he

should assist the child only when assistance is demanded. This was a strange sort of education to advocate in a land like Russia. Holy Russia pestered Tolstoy until it made him ill; and while he went away to recuperate, his school was closed by orders from "on high," and thus ended Tolstoy's career as an educational reformer. On his way to Samara, where he was going to drink sour milk, he stopped over night at Moscow, and—backslid into a gambling party, with the result that he found himself with a debt of five hundred dollars. But the man who had beaten him, Katkov, was the editor of the *Russky Vyesnik*, and accepted as payment of Tolstoy's gambling debt the manuscript of "The Cossacks."

It was now the summer of 1862. Tolstoy was paying court to Sophia Behrs, and experienced the spiritual anguish which he has described in his "Confession," in the "Kreutzer Sonata," and in "Anna Karenin"; the anguish which the thoughts of his past debauches aroused in him when he thought of offering his life to a pure woman. But at least he would be honest, so just before he was married he asked his bride to read his diary, in which he had laid bare his whole life.

Sophia Behrs—or Sonya, as Tolstoy called her—made as helpful a wife as any Russian ever had. In the "Reminiscences of Tolstoy," one of the novelist's sons, Count Ilya Tolstoy, describes the daily life on his father's estate: "The chief personage in the house was my mother. She settled everything. She interviewed Nikolai the cook and ordered dinner; she sent us out for walks, made our shirts, was always nursing some baby at the breast; all day long she bustled about the house with hurried steps."

She bore Tolstoy thirteen children, five sons and three daughters of whom grew to maturity. But she was more

than a good mother and an efficient housekeeper; she was Tolstoy's literary assistant. And what a man to assist! Her son writes: "Leaning over the manuscript and trying to decipher my father's scrawl with her short-sighted eyes, she used to spend whole evenings at work, and often sat up late at night after everybody else had gone to bed. Sometimes, when anything was written quite illegibly, she would go to my father's study and ask him what it meant. But this was very rare, because my mother did not like to disturb him. When it happened, my father would take the manuscript in his hand and ask with some annoyance: 'What on earth is the difficulty?' and begin to read it out loud. When he came to the difficult place, he would mumble and hesitate, and sometimes had the greatest difficulty in making out, or rather in guessing, what he had written. He had a very bad handwriting and a terrible habit of inserting whole sentences between the lines, or in the corners of the page, or sometimes right across it. My mother often discovered gross grammatical errors, and pointed them out to my father and corrected them." Seven times over she copied the manuscript of "War and Peace."

These fifteen years, 1863-1878, were Tolstoy's most wonderful years as a creative artist. To these years we owe his two great novels, "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenin," two of the longest and greatest works of Russian fiction. Already in the fifties Russia looked up to Tolstoy for great things: Turgenev, for instance, wrote in 1854, "If heaven only grant Tolstoy life, I confidently expect he will surprise us all," and two years later Turgenev writes of him to the critic Druzhinin: "When this young wine has done fermenting, the result will be a liquor worthy of the gods." And now Tolstoy, for a few years at least, found inspiration in the life of his young and growing family. He writes in

his "Confession": "The new circumstances of a happy family life completely led me away from the search after the meaning of life as a whole. My life was concentrated at this time in the family,—my wife and children,—and consequently in the care for increasing the means of life. The effort to effect my own individual perfection, already replaced by the striving after general progress, was again changed into an effort to secure the particular happiness of my family."

He thought of portraying the spirit and the men of the uprising of December, 1825; but as he got deeper into his subject it grew; he went back to the conditions in Russia preceding the December uprising; his novel became vaster and vaster in scope until he realized that he was really writing an epic of Russia during the Napoleonic wars, an epic of Russian war and peace.

"War and Peace" is properly called an epic. It is scarcely a novel in the strict sense of the term; and if we judge it by the canons of art which we apply, for instance, to the novels of Ivan Turgenev, we shall do it scant justice. Turgenev's novels are artistically unified, balanced delineations of life; Tolstoy's "War and Peace" is limitless in its scope, with climax after climax, like a rolling steppe, endless in its expanse. Like Thomas Hardy's Napoleonic drama in nineteen acts, "War and Peace" is a texture of a dozen dramas of human life, twined and intertwined into an epic. If Turgenev's art reminds us of the exquisiteness and spirituality of Raphael, Tolstoy paints with a giant brush, paints all the world at once, like Michelangelo.

"War and Peace" does not center on the career of one man, or even of one family. Out of the hundreds that move before us and the hundreds of thousands who fill the background,—emperors, kings and princes and courtiers, and common, honest men,—the members of five families of

the Russian nobility stand out, and around their destinies the action of the novel turns: the families of the Kuragins, the Bolkonskys, the Rostovs, the Bezukhois, and the Drubetzkais. I must confess at the very start the utter hopelessness of any attempt I may make to summarize the plot of "War and Peace." Are we to take it from the military angle? But Tolstoy's action embraces several entire campaigns, and records not only the ascendancy and decline of Napoleon and his generals, but the military careers of Austrian and Prussian generals, more learned but not wiser than Russia's "Old Man Kutuzov." The battles of Schoengrabben and Austerlitz and Borodino, the Peace of Tilsit, the sacking and burning of Smolensk and Moscow, and Napoleon's tragic retreat from Russia determine the course of events in this novel.

Or are we to approach it from the romantic angle? And what a gallery of romances! There is Count Pierre's animal passion for Princess Ellen Kuragin,—Ellen with the marble-like shoulders, enameled by the gaze of a thousand eyes that had feasted on them. Her father, Prince Vassily, had failed to rob the young man of the enormous fortune to which he is about to fall heir, but what the father's cunning had failed to obtain, his voluptuous daughter easily grasps. And an infernal family life follows. There is the purely calculating, passionless romance of the clever climber Prince Boris Drubetzkoi for the meadows and forests of Julia Kuragin; again there is the love of Count Nikolai Rostov for his devoted Sonya, for the Czar Alexander, and finally for Princess Maria Bolkonsky, the richest heiress in Russia, whom he saves from the French invasion beyond Smolensk, becoming knight beyond compare in her eyes. When his father's estate shows him a bankrupt, Rostov refuses to ask for her hand and she practically has to do the proposing for him.

And there is Natasha, wonderful, inexhaustible Natasha

Rostov, Tolstoy's dearest woman, who sings her life through the entire scale of love in all its varieties,—loving Boris adolescently, just after she had left off loving her nurse; loving her dancing-master esthetically and Captain Denisov pitifully; devotedly worshiping Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, loving him with fear and trembling as one loves a god, and ready to throw her life in passionate abandon for Prince Anatol Kuragin, whom she loves as one loves a devil; poisoning herself and almost dying of a broken heart over the deceit of a shameless libertine, and all but withering away as she tries to nurse back to life the hero of Austerlitz and of Borodino; and, after all, meeting her real destiny in Count Pierre Bezukhoi and finding perfect and lasting happiness in worrying over her many babies. This love story, or rather this story of many loves, is unutterably beautiful, for truly Tolstoy has achieved a triumph in his portrayal of Natasha Rostov, who has made herself the heroine of a novel which has a dozen heroes.

But while the "grand passion" is revealed in all its shades in this Russian epic, we must leave the consideration of it for the study of the deeper ideas in "War and Peace,"—ideas which make this book more than a novel, just as Hugo's "Misérables" is more than a novel—a great human document. Of course it is needless to say that "War and Peace" is a work of art, not a sermon; Tolstoy wrote it before he turned to sermons. And yet "War and Peace" has a message,—it is a protest against what Tolstoy regards as a mistaken interpretation of history; against the view, namely, which we generally associate with Carlyle: the ordering of mankind by heroes and geniuses. In opposition to the hero and genius, Tolstoy points to the mass, to the millions, to the people. Tolstoy's "War and Peace," in its description of the great Napoleonic battles, is a constant proclamation

of this thesis. Napoleon, who had won every battle, lost the battle of Borodino. Why? "Many historians assert that the battle of Borodino was not won by the French because Napoleon had a cold in the head; that if it had not been for this cold, his arrangements before and during the battle would have displayed still more genius, and Russia would have been conquered and the face of the world would have been changed. . . . If it had depended on Napoleon's will to fight or not to fight the battle of Borodino, on his will to make or not to make such and such dispositions of his forces, then evidently the cold in his head, which had such influence on the manifestations of his will, may have been the cause of the salvation of Russia; and the valet who, on September 5, forgot to provide Napoleon with waterproof boots was the saviour of Russia."

But this is entirely wrong, as wrong as it is to believe that there is such a thing as a science of war, or that one man can really prearrange, not in details, but even in its most general outlines, the course that a battle will take. "No one can possibly know," Prince Andrei says, "what will be the position of our army and that of the enemy a day from now, and no one can know what is the force of this or that division. Sometimes, when there is no coward in the front to cry, 'We are cut off!' and to start the panic, and there *is* a jovial, audacious man there to shout, 'Hurrah!' a division of five thousand is worth thirty thousand, as was the case at Schoengraben; and sometimes fifty thousand will fly before eight, as happened at Austerlitz. Why did we lose the battle of Austerlitz?" Prince Andrei tells Pierre on the eve of the battle of Borodino: "Our loss was not much greater than that of the French, but we said to ourselves very early in the engagement that we should lose it, and we did lose it. And we said this because there was no reason

for being in a battle there, and we were anxious to get away from the battle-field as soon as possible. 'We have lost, so let us run,' and we did run. If we had not said this till evening, God knows what would have happened. But to-morrow we shall not say that. You say our position, the left flank, is weak, the right flank too much extended, . . . but that is all nonsense. It is not so at all. For what is before us to-morrow? A hundred millions of the most various possibilities, which will be decided instantaneously by the fact that either they or our men will start to run, this one or that one will be killed."

And in criticizing this view of war—and of human events in general—let us remember that Tolstoy fought at Sevastopol, fought not with the general staff, but in the trenches. The battle of Schoengraben was won for Russia by a captain who held his ground and disobeyed his orders,—and was almost court-martialed for his pains by the learned strategists who smelled the smoke from afar, while he was winning the battle for them in spite of their tactics.

Russia defeated Napoleon simply by keeping out of his way and letting him straggle along to his destruction. And therein lies the true greatness of Kutuzov, Russia's Grand Old Man, of whom this book is a eulogy. A plea for the masses, for the countless millions who are never taken into account, such is "War and Peace," and as such it already anticipates Tolstoy's later populism. Yet it is an immortal portrayal of Russia's aristocracy, too, in the days of the first Alexander. It is also an international novel, and in it Tolstoy has shown himself a master. Across his stage move French marshals, Austrian archdukes, German generals, and Russians of all varieties, and all true to life, typical bearers of their national characters.

Quite obvious it is, and quite interesting in view of the

present war, that Tolstoy is no worshipper of German wisdom. "The Frenchman," he says, "is self-confident because he considers himself individually, both as regards mind and body, irresistibly captivating to either men or women. The Englishman is self-confident through his absolute conviction that he is a citizen of the most fortunately constituted kingdom in the world, and because, as an Englishman, he knows always and in all circumstances what it is requisite for him to do, and also knows that all that he does as an Englishman is correct beyond cavil. The Italian is self-confident because he is excitable and easily forgets himself and others. The Russian is self-confident for the precise reason that he knows nothing and wishes to know nothing, because he believes that it is impossible to know anything. But the German is self-confident in a worse way than all the rest, above and beyond all the rest, because he imagines that he knows the truth,—the science which he has himself invented, but which for him is absolute truth!"

Already in "War and Peace" we see Tolstoy grappling with two great problems of a moral-religious character: the problem of the meaning of life and the problem of love and marriage. Count Pierre and Prince Andrei spend their whole lives in trying to find some meaning in life, some ideal which will illumine it and make it precious, worth while. And we notice that, while Pierre's marriage to Princess Ellen is the most piteous—indeed, the most wicked—mesalliance, Tolstoy would not let his hero love and marry the wonderful Natasha until after his wretched wife is dead. These two problems Tolstoy now takes up in portraying Konstantin Levin's spiritual struggle to find the meaning of human life and a worthy ideal, and the adulterous passion which works chaos in the lives of Alexey Vronsky and Anna Karenin. To this next novel, Tolstoy's masterpiece, we must now turn.

"Anna Karenin" is the greatest portrayal of adulterous love in the history of fiction. The heroine, Anna, is an honest soul whose virtue has made her famous in dissolute St. Petersburg; beautiful, deeply emotional, craving love, she has been married to Alexey Karenin, a high public official twice her age, who gives her a fine house and social prestige, but who is too much occupied with his career as a statesman and is of too cold a nature to give her what she desires above all,—plain, unqualified love. Alexey Karenin is the sort of man who, after saying a loving word to his wife, takes pains to preserve his dignity by laughing at himself lest she consider him sentimental. Another Alexey comes on the scene—Alexey Vronsky, dashing, brilliant, handsome, courteous, generous, passionate, a very knight of love, ready to throw his military career, his reputation—his all—to the four winds of heaven for her sake. And before very long Alexey Karenin finds that the wife he has been too busy to love is no longer his to love.

Adultery has never had so fine a chance to justify itself as it does in "Anna Karenin." At the beginning there is something volcanic—and something almost worthy, too—in this passion; it commands respect. What is it, then, that inevitably causes the tragic ruin of the dénouement? To be sure, "the greater number of the young women, who envied Anna and had long been weary of hearing her called 'virtuous,' rejoiced at the fulfilment of their predictions, and were waiting only for a decisive turn in public opinion to fall upon her with all the weight of their scorn. They were already making ready their handfuls of mud to fling at her when the right moment arrived." But Vronsky's social position is such that he can safely challenge society to insult him and his mistress. He is rich, he installs her in his home in all imaginable luxury. Anna's husband is ready to give her her freedom. Why, then, isn't she happy?

None of the hackneyed punishments would do for Tolstoy. It is not for men to punish those who have broken the law of God. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay," reads the motto of this novel. Anna is outwardly happy; she drinks the cup of love to the full,—and where could she find another lover like Vronsky! "But in dreams, when she had no control over her thoughts, her position presented itself to her in all its hideous nakedness. One dream haunted her almost every night. She dreamed that both were her husband at once, that both were lavishing caresses upon her. Alexey Alexandrovitch was weeping, kissing her hands and saying, 'How happy we are now!' And Alexey Vronsky was there, too; and he, too, was her husband. And she was marveling that it had once seemed impossible to her, was explaining to them, laughing, that this was ever so much simpler, and that now both of them were happy and contented. But this dream weighed on her like a nightmare, and she awoke from it in terror."

This is the punishment: Anna's own moral nature punishes her. Love has mastered her, and for the sake of love she has scorned all; but love has torn her spiritual nature in two. Love for Vronsky has led her to desert her husband, but the pure love for her son, which is the spark of God within her, keeps her from yielding completely to Vronsky, tears her soul, and makes her love a succession of the most intense happiness and the most unspeakable agony. The questioning, innocent eyes of her boy Seryozha haunt her: from the moment she has left her lover to visit her son, we know that she will never be happy. She hates her former husband for his forgiving spirit. "I have heard it said that women love men even for their vices," Anna exclaims to her brother; "but I hate him for his virtues. I can't live with him. Do you understand? The sight of him has a physical effect on me; it makes me beside myself. I can't—I can't

live with him. What am I to do? . . . Would you believe it that, knowing he's a good man, a splendid man,—that I'm not worth his little finger,—still, I hate him! I hate him for his generosity!"

But this sort of thing cannot last. Vronsky, who has been urging her to avail herself of her husband's offer, obtain her divorce, and marry him, at last begins to grow weary of the irregular relation. Or so it appears to Anna. She begins to be tortured by jealousy; she agrees to ask her husband to divorce her, but now he refuses. Anna is in despair; her groundless doubts of her lover, her growing irritability, her frenzied passion, which literally maddens her, complete the ruin which her adulterous passion had begun. Immediately after a quarrel with her, Vronsky has gone on a business visit. She writes him to come to her immediately. His delay in answering infuriates her; she will punish him, she says, in the only way she knows,—by killing herself. And the wheels of a railroad train under which she throws herself end the tragedy of her life.

Pestilential is illicit passion, Tolstoy tells us. But is human life truly blessed even by honest love alone? Can self-seeking love under any conditions supply men with the solution of the problem of life? Can it *by itself* make a spiritually sensitive man truly contented? This question Tolstoy attempts to answer in his story of the love and married life of Konstantin Levin and Kitty Shtcherbatzky, which forms the counterpart in this novel of the adulterous love of Alexey Vronsky and Anna Karenin.

The portrait of Konstantin Levin is autobiographic. There is, to be sure, something of Tolstoy's own character in the two main figures of "War and Peace," Prince Andrei and Count Pierre Bezukhoi; but Konstantin Levin utters in the pages of "Anna Karenin" the thoughts and dreams

which, a few years later, Tolstoy is to utter in his own name. Therefore it is essential to our understanding of this later Tolstoy—the Tolstoy from the year 1880 on—that we see what forces of spiritual unrest make this Tolstoyan hero unable to find perfect bliss in the love of a devoted, beautiful woman like Kitty Shtcherbatzky.

Levin is a wealthy landowner of an incurably serious turn of mind. He is not a saint; the book of his youth contains filthy pages of debauch; but his miserable memory of them is matched by an equally wretched consciousness of the futility of his outwardly blameless mature life. He is gloomy, not because he is vicious, but because he can see no meaning, no worthwhileness in a virtuous life. He is ambitious, and yet his every undertaking seems empty and futile. Needless to say, he scorns the silly fripperies of society; but even in the honest toil of his own farm he fails to find lasting satisfaction. Life is vanity to him. Life with Kitty Shtcherbatzky, he dreams, would be life worth living. Kitty respects him profoundly, but she loves Vronsky and refuses Levin. When Vronsky forsakes her for Anna Karenin, Kitty is almost killed by the humiliation, and even more by the realization of the sterling qualities of the man she has rejected. Kind fate intervenes, however, and in the course of time Levin and Kitty do marry.

The new life satisfies him for a while, even as married life contented Tolstoy himself; but the old questions and the old discontent return, due in part, though not entirely, to the inevitable frictions and quarrels of a married couple whose only fault is perhaps that they love each other too devotedly. But the death of his wretched brother and the birth of his child, two events which Tolstoy describes in an unforgettable manner, bring Levin face to face with the problems of life and death. What answer can he find to

those questions in the materialistic, so-called scientific beliefs which for him had replaced the simple Christian faith of his childhood? Like a man seeking for food in toy-shops and tool-shops, he reads over scientific and philosophical books, seeking an answer to the question: What makes life worth living? He abandons materialistic philosophy and reads and rereads thoroughly Plato, Spinoza, Kant, Schelling, Hegel, and Schopenhauer. But he can get no light, and his spirit is tortured. " 'Without knowing what I am and why I am here, life's impossible; and that I can't know, and so I can't live,' Levin said to himself. 'In infinite time, in infinite matter, in infinite space, is formed a bubble-organism, and that bubble lasts awhile and bursts, and that bubble is Me. . . .' And Levin, a happy father and husband, in perfect health, was several times so near suicide that he hid the rope that he might not be tempted to hang himself, and was afraid to go out with his gun for fear of shooting himself."

He takes good care of his peasants, he is honest in his dealings, he is true and loving to his wife,—but what is it all about, he asks himself as he watches his peasants working. " 'Why is it all being done? Why am I standing here making them work? What are they all so busy for, trying to show their zeal before me? What is that old peasant woman toiling for? I doctored her once when the beam fell on her in the fire,' he thought, looking at a thin old woman who was raking up the grain, moving painfully with her bare, sun-blackened feet over the rough, uneven floor. 'Then she recovered, but to-day or to-morrow or in ten years she won't; they'll bury her, and nothing will be left either of her or of that smart girl in the red jacket, who, with that skilful soft action, shakes the ears out of their husks. They'll bury her and that piebald horse, and very soon, too,' he thought,

gazing at the heavily moving, panting horse that kept walking up the wheel that turned under him. 'And they'll bury her and Fyodor the threshers with his curly beard full of chaff and his shirt torn on his white shoulders,—they'll bury him. He is untying the sheaves and giving orders and shouting to the women, and quickly setting straight the strap on the moving wheel. And what's more, it's not them alone,—me they'll bury, too, and nothing will be left. What for?' "

To some people all this may seem so much morbid introspection. Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise. But such bliss is vouchsafed only to fools and cattle. A calf may graze its way into cattlehood without being bothered by problems; but man is not a calf, although millions of men remain calf-like in their attitude toward life. Man must have a philosophy of life or perish spiritually. In addition to having hunger and thirst and other animal needs and the means of satisfying them, Levin is a man, and the problems which oppress his soul must be solved, or at least understood, else he cannot live.

A peasant accidentally enlightens him. He speaks of a friend of his who "lives for God, for his soul." To the peasant this seems perfectly clear, but the idea of it staggers Levin. What does it mean to live for God, for one's soul? Why is it that the ignorant peasant understands that which the learned landowner cannot? But an even greater puzzle confronts him: the peasant thinks that he, Levin, is also such a man, living for God, for his soul. Can it be that the peasant is right? Levin looks into his life. Could it be possible that, while his intellect has been making him miserable, deeper down in his soul truths too profound for words have been shaping the actual course of his life? "What did *this* mean? It meant that he had been living rightly, but thinking wrongly. He had lived, without being aware of it, on those

spiritual truths which he had sucked in with his mother's milk; but he had thought not merely without recognition of these truths, but studiously ignoring them. . . . What should I have been, and how should I have spent my life, if I had not had these beliefs," he asks himself,—“had I not known that I must live for God and not for my own desires? . . . I looked for an answer to my question. And thought could not give an answer to my question—it is incommensurable with my question. The answer has been given me by life itself, in my knowledge of what is right and what is wrong. And that knowledge I did not arrive at in any way; it is given to me as to all men, given because I could not have got it from anywhere. Where could I have got it? By reason could I have arrived at knowing that I must love my neighbor and not oppress him? I was told that in my childhood and I believed it gladly, for they told me what was already in my soul. But who discovered it? Not reason. Reason discovered the struggle for existence and the law that requires us to oppress all who hinder the satisfaction of our desires. That is the deduction of reason. But loving one's neighbor, reason could never discover, because it is irrational.”

It would of course be rank injustice to Tolstoy as an artist to say that he is preaching here. Tolstoy the novelist portrays life objectively and very often in direct opposition to what appears to be his own personal thesis. Thus the Russian critic Pisarev wrote of “War and Peace”: “The figures he has created have their own life independently of the intentions of the author; they enter into direct relations with the reader, speak for themselves, and unavoidably bring the reader to such thoughts and conclusions as the author never had in view and of which he perhaps would not approve.” Nevertheless it is quite clear to any intelligent reader of

"Anna Karenin" that here we have not merely a portrayal of men in spiritual struggles and anguish, but the portrayal of them by an author who is himself struggling and anguished spiritually. We know now what the men who read "Anna Karenin" as it was published serially in the seventies did not know—the struggle of life and death which was going on in Tolstoy's soul; a struggle between the artist and the man, a struggle of the man whose genius the world admired and approved, but who could not admire his own work because he was not sure that God approved it; indeed, was not certain there was any God to approve it, and found his life poisoned by the uncertainty. The masterpiece he was creating seemed to him paltry, futile. "Everything in it is beastly," he writes; "the whole thing ought to be rewritten, scrapped and melted down, thrown away and renounced. I ought to say I am sorry, I won't do it any more. What difficulty is there in writing how an officer fell in love with a married woman? There is no difficulty in it, and, above all, no good in it." Think of the spiritual state a man must be in if, capable of writing a masterpiece like "Anna Karenin," he is also capable of writing thus about it!

Tolstoy had gained the whole world, yet had not found his soul. He had a happy family and a well-managed estate of twenty-five hundred acres. The whole world applauded his art. Yet he contemplated suicide. There must be some way out of it. How he found this way, and how unreservedly he entered upon it, to the sacrifice of every other ideal, every other interest, is the story of the last thirty years of Tolstoy's life, and is one of the most impressive spiritual documents of modern times.